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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3845  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9410  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3055  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3185  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0794  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 005772

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SECSTATE FOR EAP/IET AND DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KJUS](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: FORCED CHURCH CLOSINGS CONTINUE IN WEST JAVA

REF: A. 05 JAKARTA 14621 "DRAFT DECREE TO DISADVANTAGE

MINORITIES"

[1](#)B. 05 JAKARTA 14281 "CHARGE LOBBIES ON RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM"

[1](#)C. 05 JAKARTA 16065 "POST AND NGOS LOBBY ON DECREE"

[1](#)D. JAKARTA 1649 "RELIGIOUS DECREE EASES RESTRICTIONS"

[1](#)E. JAKARTA 04972 "DECREE ENDS IN COMPROMISE"

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Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER LISSA M MCATEE, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

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#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Local Muslim communities, assisted by militant outfits, have forcibly closed 13 small unlicensed churches despite the government of Indonesia's newly promulgated revised decree on the establishment of houses of worship on March 23 (ref E). The new decree legally protects existing unlicensed places of worship by allowing them up to two years to come into compliance with licensing requirements. Local governments in West Java appear to lack understanding of the late March decree and political will to enforce its provisions. According to some accounts, police do not prevent church closures in these cases because they see their role as keeping the peace by not confronting the will of the predominantly Muslim communities. Christian leaders complain of extortion by militant Islamic groups. While a lag in awareness of the new decree is understandable in Indonesia's decentralized system of governance, Jakarta authorities need to step up their efforts to increase understanding and respect for the revised regulations, and prepare to intervene when local governments fail to comply. End Summary.

#### CHURCHES CLOSED DESPITE NEW DECREE

[1](#)2. (SBU) Local Muslims, egged on by militant groups like the Islam Defender's Front (FPI) and the Alliance of Anti-Apostates (AGAP), have closed down eight churches in Bogor, three in Bandung, and two in Bekasi, all cities in West Java, according John Simon Timorason, Chair of Forum for Christian Communication (FKKI) in West Java. Many of the targeted churches in Bogor were private residences that held religious services. Thus far there has been little coverage of the church closings in the national press, possibly because of a lack of public sympathy for small denominations

holding services in residences and rented store fronts.

¶3. (SBU) Recent church closings are likely the result of local governments' lack of understanding of the new decree and political will to implement its provisions. The decree legally protects existing unlicensed places of worship by granting such establishments two years to comply with the requirements for establishing a licensed house of worship. The central government held a meeting to educate governors around the country about the legal implications of the decrees, but Timorason said the information had not trickled down to the regency level or lower. Perpetrators of church closings used more restrictive local laws to justify the forced closure of places of worship even though the new decree legally subsumes such local laws. Timorason said that in order for the decree to be successfully implemented the central government needed to compel local governments to enforce the new decree and scrap conflicting local laws; until then, it is easier for local government to be complacent, and sometimes complicit, in church closings.

#### ROLE OF THE POLICE

¶4. (C) Another key component to the implementation of the decree is the role of the police. According to some accounts, police do not prevent church closures in these cases because they see their role as keeping the peace by not confronting the will of the predominantly Muslim communities. It is likely that unless the police take action against militant groups who forcibly close churches without legal authority, they will continue regardless of the decree. Timorason said that in a meeting with Muhammad Mumin, head of AGAP, Mumin shrugged off the legal protections provided in the revised decree and said he would continue to close down "illegal" churches. Commissioner for Religious Freedom at

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the Nation Commission for Human Rights (Komnas Ham), Chandra Setiawan, told us that he will draft a letter to the Ministry of Religion to request that they coordinate with the police to stop closures. He said he would also press the Ministry to "take more responsibility" for the implementation of the decree.

#### EXTORTION

¶5. (C) Christian leaders told us privately that groups like FPI were largely motivated by money. Timorason cited the recent example of when the police arranged a meeting between himself and member(s) of FPI to discuss a specific church that they threatened to close. During the meeting, FPI offered to refrain from closing the church in exchange for the Rupiah equivalent of \$50,000. (Note: Timorason did not say who in the police arranged the meeting or whether they were aware of FPI's attempted extortion. End Note). Reverend Richard M. Daulay, General Secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) confirmed that FPI conducted extortion. He added that generally churches cannot afford the amount FPI demands. Both Timorason and Daulay saw this as a dangerous sign of the kind of corruption that could become prevalent with the formation of the community forum groups (FKUB) with the power to make recommendations as proscribed in the revised decree (ref E). The decree allows local governments up to one year to form an FKUB, and it remains to be seen who will sit on the forum and how it will operate.

#### DECREE NOT PERFECT

¶6. (C) Timorason is currently collecting data and researching the weaknesses of the implementation of the decree to share with the central government. He said that in discussions

with the Ministry of Religious Affairs Head of Research and Development Affairs, H.M. Atho Mudzhar (ref C), Mudzhar admitted that the his Ministry rushed to complete the revisions to the decree and that it was "not perfect". Daulay summed up best what many involved in the drafting of the decree expressed to us: "The revised decree is bad, but previous draft revisions were worse, and the original decree was the worst; therefore, I support the revised decree."

COMMENT

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17. (C) Not surprisingly in Indonesia's decentralized system of governance, the late March decree on houses of worship did not filter down immediately to many local communities in West Java, which continue to record closings of small home and store-front churches. If the new decree is to increase protection for religious minorities, the Indonesian Government will need to step up its efforts to educate local governments on the revised system and prepare to intervene when community-level authorities ignore its provisions. In the meantime, we will express our expectation to the central government that they take measures to end unauthorized closures until the decree has taken root.  
PASCOE